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**TIM RYAN**  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
13TH DISTRICT, OHIO

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
LEGISLATIVE BRANCH SUBCOMMITTEE  
RANKING MEMBER  
DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE  
MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS,  
AND RELATED AGENCIES SUBCOMMITTEE

August 15, 2018

Honorable Paul Lawrence  
Under Secretary for Benefits  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Under Secretary Lawrence:

I was disappointed to learn that you testified in opposition to the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (HR 299) during the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on August 1, 2018. As you know, the House of Representatives passed this legislation with a unanimous vote of 382-0. Any bill that garners that type of support in our current partisan political environment deserves to become a law. I ask that you reconsider your opinion on this legislation for the sake of the 90,000 veterans who would benefit from this bill.

The argument that there is not enough scientific evidence of exposure for Blue Water Navy veterans is not valid. Currently, any ground-force veteran who served anywhere in Vietnam is presumed to have been exposed to dioxin. A test is not required to calculate the level of exposure based on where the veteran served in Vietnam. These guidelines should be applied to the Blue Water Navy veterans who were exposed to the same chemicals. Although it was recommended that ships went at least 12 miles offshore to take on water, that was not a requirement, and the 2011 Institute of Medicine study found that this guidance was routinely ignored. The same distillation system on the ship that was used to make water for the boilers was used for potable water. So, when this system took on contaminated water, sailors were exposed to dioxin. Additionally, another study showed that dioxin has been found in seafood 150 nautical miles from shore. Therefore, a sailor who did not have his "boots on the ground" may have been exposed to a higher concentration of dioxin than a soldier who was in the central highlands of Vietnam.

For decades our Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans have been denied the benefits that they have clearly earned. They deserve better. This legislation rectifies the damage our government has done to these veterans who sacrificed much in the service of our country. Your support in the Department of Veterans Affairs will be essential to the success of this bill. I ask that you continue to work closely with the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee to provide these critical benefits to our country's Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans.

Sincerely,

Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress

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